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ABSTRACT

Although the development of new models is essential to the improvement of teacher preparation programs, the California system of accreditation of teacher education programs seems to hinder innovative program development and evaluation. External assessment in California is based on a discrepancy model which works best when applied to static programs. Excessive paperwork, slow turn-around time for program proposals, and complex bookkeeping procedures are problems related to reporting program changes. Failure to report program changes results in discrepancy with the state-approved program. Static programs are rewarded by decreased paperwork and lessened chance of discrepancy; the more dynamic programs must pay a high price through increased bureaucratic effort. The California system of accreditation needs to be changed if innovative teacher education programs are to be encouraged. (Author/HV)

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PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

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The development of new programs in professional education is a ritualistic form of optimism as essential to teacher education as the planting of spring crops to the farmer. I am concerned that the State of California adoption of External Assessment for accrediting professional education programs may slow down institutional efforts to develop new programs and this could have a harmful effect on teacher education in California. The barrage of complaints about this current California system of accrediting teacher education programs is largely aimed at implementation problems. Participants justifiably complain about cost, excess paperwork, assessors who leave after the first long orientation meeting never to be heard from again, and the strange language substituted for English in the [illegible] assessment guidelines. If the managers of the accreditation system exhibit enough patience and extreme optimism their continued efforts may eliminate some of the more galling bureaucratic aspects of the External Assessment. But no matter how successful they are in working out the kinks, the system has some serious implications for those California institutions most interested in program development in teacher education. The basic idea of external assessment may have a more serious effect in the long run on program development than bureaucratic Kafkaism.

This separation of implementation problems from problems intrinsic in the notion of external assessment is not meant to underestimate the discomfort caused by the implementation. Rather my purpose is to look at the basic ideas of external assessment and the implications for program development.

For the first design conference (February 12, 1974) the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing chose the theme "External Assessment: A Better Way." A

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Commission document given to participants noted that the Commission "... along with many accrediting agencies, organizations, legislative bodies, and institutions of higher education is seeking a better way." This focus made improbable any effort to improve the existing process of accreditation. And since the conferees were representatives of constituencies soon to participate in the external assessment process, it is easy to see why the focus was not changed. Thus a key part of external assessment is participation in the process by representatives from a variety of constituencies, an idea most professional educators support in principle.

In practice constituency participation has not worked well. Many of those elected to represent a constituency come to the first orientation meeting for an institutional external assessment and are never to be seen again. Some attrition may be caused by the large stack of Xeroxed documents each participant is issued. This attrition, though, is due to bureaucratic pressure. There may be another more basic reason for their not participating after the first session. As representatives of groups which have a vital interest in the education of teachers they come to the orientation meeting ready to ask questions about the program they are to help assess. In short order they find that the questions they have are not allowed by the rules of the discrepancy model of external assessment. When as a constituency representative you want to know what a teacher education institution is doing to prepare beginning teachers to work with minority children, it is discouraging to be told that the questions you are to ask the institutional representatives refer to compliance to the program under reference 1.4.1a.

This discrepancy model of evaluation is a second key concept in the California system of external assessment. This model was not proposed by conferees but built into the deliberations by the Commission who made it clear from the outset that external assessment must assess the degree to which the proposed programs were meeting state guidelines.

The difference between program promised and program delivered by an institution is obviously the discrepancy sought by the model. In its most simple format the California system of accreditation amounts to a broad representation of constituents determining if an institution is doing what it said it would do. That the system is not called a "congruency" model where assessors search for ways that the institution is conforming to its plan is more a symptom of the negative aspects of accountability than a basic flaw in the design.

The discrepancy model makes it difficult for institutions to improve the content of teacher education curriculum. For example, research in teacher behavior is advancing at a frenzied pace. Each year many findings which have implications for teacher education curriculum are published. It is ironic that one of the most important and fruitful studies of teacher behavior, The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, was sponsored by the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, a commission whose rules on external assessment make implementation of the findings improbable. Common sense would dictate that the new data supercedes the old. But program approval is based on the old objectives. Substitute the new and your program is discrepant. The way to avoid being discrepant is to write an addendum for the program approval that must be approved by the Commission or their consultants. One need not be a student of B. F. Skinner to note that the M and Ms go to those who change least. They never need to write lengthy reports. For those who must change there are problems.

The stated mission of the University of California, Davis in the field of education "... includes a responsibility to develop and evaluate models for the education of teachers and the learning process of students". Our mission is not the preparation of large numbers of teachers. Program development for model testing differs from program development in institutions whose mission is preparing large numbers of teachers. These latter institutions develop a "production program"

design for training large numbers of teachers. Their program has a need for some stability over time. A model program, on the other hand, must be temporary in nature. An ideal time cycle for a model program might be four years: one year for piloting, one year for implementation, one year for evaluation, and a final year for phasing the program out.

A production program adopts the best program available and each year makes those changes for improvement that experience suggests. A production program is by necessity an efficient program. Many students must be well prepared and the program logistics have to be simple and economical. And production programs are in practice fairly stable in organizational structure. Any major change can be difficult.

The external assessment team which asks if an institution with a production program is doing what it promised when proposing the program is apt to receive an affirmative answer. When the same question is asked of an institution charged with designing and testing model programs the answer must be "no". If it isn't a negative answer then the institution is keeping a program going long after the program has provided the data for which it was designed and tested. The discrepancy model of external assessment doesn't work well with programs designed for model testing because the discrepancy concept assumes a static nature to programs. And model testing programs should be dynamic. The better a model testing mission is implemented the less likely it will match the proposed program in the institutional approval document.

The Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing and their consultants anticipated the problem of program change. It is possible to amend an institution's document and to have new programs approved. This, however, has three major drawbacks which discourage new program development. The first problem is the turnaround time for a proposal. Here is the actual time line for our Bilingual Emphasis

Program:

April 8, 1975	Faculty meeting discussion of regulations for a bilingual/bicultural emphasis program which were recently approved. Decision to develop a program.
Fall 1975	First draft of institutional proposal completed.
December 2, 1975	Program approved by the Dept. of Education. Referred to campus academic Senate Committee on Teacher Education and Credentialing.
January 16, 1976	Campus Senate Committee gave tentative approval and sent out for review by scholars in the field of bilingual/bicultural education.
February 11, 1976	Reviews by external scholars is favorable and the Senate Committee gives final approval to program. Sent through campus channels for forwarding to the State.
March 10, 1976	Program officially sent to Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing.
August 3, 1976	First response from the State. Campus departmental members discuss program with State consultant.
October 3, 1976	Discussion with consultant by telephone and in person. Program cleared for Commission consideration.
December 1976	Final approval of the bilingual emphasis program by the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing.

The 20 months from the beginning of the process to program approval would be difficult under any institutional circumstances. When the institutional mission is program development it becomes almost an impossible time-lag. Turn-around time becomes such a difficult hurdle that there is high motivation for institutions to avoid sending new documentation to the State. Rather there is every reason to run new programs under old approvals. External assessment would very possibly find this a cramming of new pickles in old jars. But faced with slow turn-around or discovery by external assessment there is a strong temptation to slow the model testing procedure.

A second related problem is purely a bookkeeping matter. If model-testing institutions have eight distinct programs and are on a four-year change cycle, an average of two programs a year will be changing. In actual practice this is probably a low estimate for Davis for the past five or six years. During this period we were closer to three program changes a year. The rapid change of Commission personnel makes it highly unlikely for changes to be approved before they are implemented by the institution. It is also doubtful that an accurate record of current programs is available at the State level. Obviously there can be little correspondence between what was described at the time of program approval and what is going on in a dynamic situation. Logistically the discrepancy model works best for static programs. The temptation to avoid program changes, to remain static, so the discrepancy model will work is great. There is some evidence that this is happening in California.

A related third problem of the discrepancy model is the enormous amount of paperwork required to keep the Commission informed of program changes and to prepare for accreditation. This problem is bureaucratic but a logical outcome of the model. The increasing necessity of reporting on program changes is inherent in the idea of discrepancy. Reported program changes avoid discrepancy. It might be postulated that the degree of Commission encouragement of program change is discerned by the amount of punishing paperwork required to report on-going changes. Most of my California colleagues would agree that by this measure the Commission is voting rather loudly against change. Put in its simplist form one avoids hours of the jargonized redtape required to report changes by not changing programs or not reporting changes.

The Ryan legislation and the accompanying Commission guidelines contain language to encourage experimental teacher education programs. Certainly such programs are an essential part of professional curriculum development. To date there

has been one experimental program approved by the Commission -- a program developed and implemented by the University of California, Davis. The Commission consultants made every effort to cut down the amount of paperwork necessary for approval. Approval was swift but did necessitate faculty participation in public hearings and other time-consuming activities. What other institutions may have anticipated and avoided became obvious to our faculty in very short order: Commission approval for experimental programs is more time-consuming than is warranted. Thus the creative institution may currently be seeking ways of subsuming "experimental programs" under existing approved programs. In contrast in an accreditation procedure where the quality of a program is assessed by criteria other than conformity to a program of the past, progressive program development would be assessed positively.

Only a few would argue that external assessment is a search for quality. Those who designed this torturous path make the following argument. The guidelines for program approval developed by the Commission consultants and approved by the Commission are a quality implementation of the Ryan Bill which, as reform legislation, provides a basis for quality. Institutional programs must meet the guidelines for approval and in this way are assuredly quality. External assessment therefore guarantees quality by making sure that everyone is doing what was planned. Other than the few who make this argument most see external assessment as a systematic accounting to a broadly representative constituency for a minimum teacher education program. For many directors of teacher education programs this system of accountability may be incompatible with institutional efforts at program development.

Teacher education needs program development. And if the external assessment decreases development, changes are needed. Here are some changes:

1. External assessment should look for positive discrepancy as well as negative discrepancy. Instead of merely asking if an institution is doing less than

promised, assessors should be asking if more than was promised is being provided. For this approach to external assessment to work, assessors need to develop their own system of inquiry or learn the Commission's system well enough to use it with ease.

2. External assessment should look favorably upon institutional modifications which are made to improve programs. The current system looks only for compliance with a specific program description. So if substitutions have been made and not reported, the assessors find a discrepancy and that is bad.

3. Commission consultants should work with an institution for a long enough time period to understand the professional education program. Continuing program development could then be observed by the consultant. The consultant's report to external assessment teams of these dynamics could be a substitute for the current impossible paperwork required to report program changes.

4. Institutions should develop modified external assessment plans. These "experimental" systems could individualize the assessment procedure somewhat. It is too early to see if the option, encouraged by the Commission, will make some of the more pressing problems of program development easier.

In summary the California external assessment program seems to stifle program development in teacher education. An accountability system to measure the institutional compliance to proposed and promised professional education programs works best when institutional programs are static. So those institutions attempting to develop and test model teacher education systems are faced with the choice of changing programs without reporting the changes, spending an inordinate amount of time reporting changes or simply not developing new programs. The latter choice is rewarded by the current system. And program stability is the last thing needed in professional education.